



Representative
**LARRY
CROUSE**

Representative
**LYNN
SCHINDLER**



Legislative Session 2001

From the Desk of



Representatives Larry Crouse & Lynn Schindler

Dear friends & neighbors,

Let's begin with the obvious: this past legislative session was far too long. But contrary to media reports, we passed some very important legislation – legislation that will make a difference for our families and communities.

For example, we passed a comprehensive energy package that is effectively dealing with the energy crisis that began over the winter. For the economy to stay strong we need reliable and affordable energy. This package combines common-sense conservation with an emphasis on generating new power in order to meet business and family needs.

We also made tremendous progress in the fight against meth labs. We worked hard to pass important legislation that restricts the access of meth-makers to chemicals used to make the drug. Until we eliminate the last meth lab in the Spokane Valley, we will continue our fight against meth, and continue the fight to make our communities safe.

Legislation that didn't get much attention in the press, but will have a long-term impact on our community, is our comprehensive water reform package. This, too, is historic legislation and should stabilize how water supplies are used well into the future.

Don't let the press fool you — we got a lot done this year!

We are both concerned about the state budget that passed (we both voted against it) and expect the Legislature will have to deal with the impact of the overspending during the next couple of years. We will continue to fight for sensible government that lives within its means and lets working families keep more of the money they earn and deserve to keep.

Lastly, a final solution to the transportation issue has not been reached yet and we discuss that in more detail in this newsletter.

We both appreciate your support this session and appreciate all of the letters and e-mails we get from you. Keep in contact. If you have any questions about this past legislative session or need help working with a state agency, be sure to give either of us a call.

Lynn Schindler

Larry Crouse

Representative **LARRY CROUSE**

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Bringing accountability to our schools . . .

The next step toward educational excellence

We had hoped that the Legislature would have moved forward this year with new policies to help schools meet new accountability standards. Unfortunately, it didn't happen.

We have set our sights high with new academic learning requirements and are using standardized tests to measure our effectiveness in improving student learning. The next step is to set up a system of accountability that will allow us to assist parents and schools where test scores are not demonstrating improvement.

Education accountability will be top priority for the Legislature during 2002 session, which begins in January. It will require removing bureaucratic barriers currently preventing us from improving performance in our schools to be dismantled.

Our teachers know that we are counting on them to help students achieve excellence. We believe the Legislature also should move forward with an accountability plan to help schools that are not meeting academic standards.

Voter-approved funding measures expand school budgets

Washington is now spending \$9.9 billion per biennium on K-12 education, which represents 43.5 percent of the entire state budget. Voters made a strong statement in favor of funding for schools by approving two education initiatives last November. The initiatives along with other enhancements resulted in an 8.7 percent increase in funding for education.

Initiative 732 guarantees annual cost-of-living pay increases for teachers based on the Seattle consumer price index – a very aggressive inflation indicator.

I-728 provides that the revenue distributions to school districts may be used for:

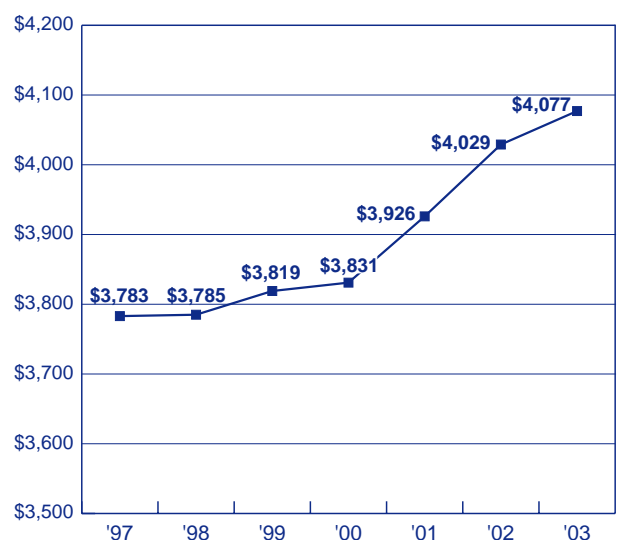
- Reducing class size

- Providing extended learning opportunities in grades K-12, including extended school hours, tutoring programs, weekend school programs, and all-day kindergarten
- Providing additional professional development for educators
- Providing early assistance for children in need of pre-kindergarten support, and
- Providing improvements or additions to school building facilities

The cost of the two initiatives totals nearly \$800 million in the current budget and will increase to more than \$1 billion in additional funding for schools in the 2001-03 biennium.

We're hopeful these and other funding enhancements provided in the state budget for our schools will achieve measurable improvement in student achievement. This is tempered, however, by our concern that the overall spending level in the current budget is higher than we can sustain, and could force cuts to existing programs or tax increases in the near future.

State Expenditures Per Pupil Adjusted for Inflation



The amount of state funding provided per pupil has increased every year for the past six years, even after adjusting for inflation.

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Rep. Schindler addresses education issues before the Legislature.

Attracting quality teachers to our public schools

In an ongoing effort to improve our public schools and provide the best opportunity for children to learn, we supported legislation adopted this year by the Legislature that will help our schools attract and retain the most qualified teachers to the classroom.

Among the bills approved this session was Senate Bill 5695, a measure that creates a statewide partnership grant program to establish alternative certification programs for classified school employees and successful professionals who want to enter the teaching profession.

The bill will make it easier for qualified individuals to become certified to teach. This will help to alleviate the growing problem of teacher shortages in schools and enhance the learning experience for students by bringing to the classroom the expertise of qualified individuals who have successful real-world experience.

The Legislature also approved, and we supported, a measure to increase the number of hours retired teachers can continue to work without a reduction in pension benefits. This will allow our schools to continue calling upon our most experienced teachers for part-time or substitute work.

Fix transportation without raising taxes . . .

Unfortunately, the recent transportation plan focused on an unacceptable solution: raising taxes! If recent history has taught us anything, it's that raising taxes isn't the answer to every problem. Even after the repeal of the motor vehicle excise tax we remain one of the highest-taxed states in the nation (and we don't even have an income tax!).

The most recent transportation funding proposal would have raised gas taxes, gross weight fees for trucks, diesel fuel taxes, and sales taxes on vehicles to generate approximately \$6 billion over the next decade to pay for a bonding package that would total roughly \$8.6 billion in projects.

Over that same time — ten years — the state will already be collecting more than \$300 billion in taxes (adjusting for inflation). Instead of raising taxes on working families and individuals living on fixed incomes (who would be hit hardest by the gas tax hike), why don't we change the way government does business? Why don't we look for ways to save that \$6 billion over the next ten years — especially since that comes to just 2 percent of the total our state will collect during that time?

Judging by the calls, hotlines and e-mails that have flooded our offices over the course of the session, there are ten people adamantly opposed to tax increases for every one person who supports them. For too long a time, government has operated under the assumption that whenever it runs out of money, it can always take more from the people.

We believe that it is possible to get a better return on the investment taxpayers already make in state government — and that we can indeed fund Washington's most pressing transportation needs without raising your taxes.

Representative **LARRY CROUSE**

Committed to the safety of our families and communities . . .

We believe the safety of citizens is the number one responsibility of government. This session we made significant progress on the fastest growing crime problem in Washington — meth labs. We passed a law making it illegal to sell or possess large quantities of the ingredients used to make meth.

Unfortunately, a proposal to add meth production to the list of “Three Strikes” offenses was stopped by the governor and House Democrats.

One of the fastest growing crimes, made worse by the new “electronic age,” is identity theft. It can destroy a person’s good name and credit, and it’s reaching epidemic proportions in the Puget Sound area. We passed legislation that expands the definition of identity theft and gives law enforcement greater tools to fight the crime. Contact the State Attorney General’s Consumer Division (1-800-551-4636) for an informational brochure on identify theft.

Concerns about the state budget . . .

More difficult decisions are in store for lawmakers this year, as our state’s economy continues to slow and lawmakers work to protect important services. Just five months into our two-year budget cycle, it looks as though lawmakers will be forced to cut services in order to keep the Democrats’ budget in balance.

The collection of tax revenues has been steadily slowing over the past several months due to our cooling economy. Meanwhile, state costs are growing. Health care costs are rising substantially, we’ve incurred \$10 million in emergency expenses fighting wildfires this summer, and security issues at schools and other public facilities have become a paramount concern.

It will require a genuine bipartisan effort in the coming months to bring this budget back into balance and make it sustainable over the long term without the need for new taxes.

Representative **LYNN SCHINDLER**

Bringing a budget into balance

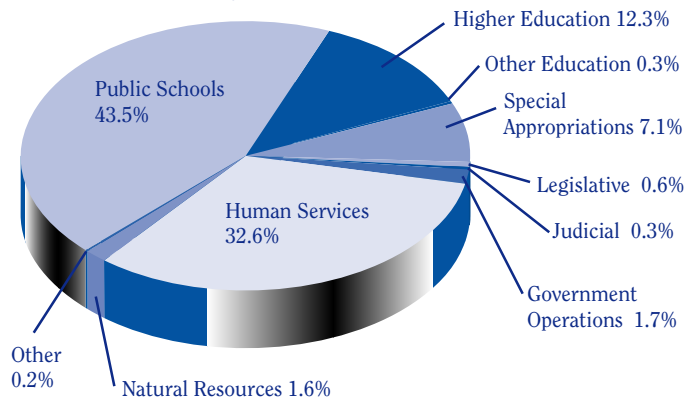
2001-03 Budget Picture

The latest economic forecast released in September showed a drop in tax revenue of more than \$100 million in the current biennium, and that was before economists had a chance to factor in the effects of the Sept. 11 attack on our state and national economy. Some economists warn that we eventually could have a budget shortfall of close to \$1 billion.

2001-03 Projected Tax Revenues	\$22,021,800,000
2001-03 Budget Expenditures	\$22,786,783,000
Difference	-\$765 million

Unrestricted General Fund Reserve	\$66 million
Emergency Reserve	\$390 million

2001-03 Budget Picture



Approximately 43.5 percent of the \$22.8 billion general fund budget goes toward K-12 education – an area lawmakers would rather not cut. The governor has asked seven of the largest state agencies to prepare contingency cuts of 15 percent from their budgets. The agencies he’s targeted for cuts include the departments of Social and Health Services, Corrections, Community Development, Health, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife, as well as the Office of Trade and Economic Development.

I was pleased to hear the governor say that the budget will be brought back into balance without raising taxes. Republicans are committed to working with him in a bipartisan manner to accomplish this.

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Rep. Crouse confers with Rep. Benson on the floor of the House chambers.

Bringing more power to Washington . . .

We both supported the historic and comprehensive energy package passed by the Legislature this year. It offers short- and long-term relief to energy consumers by combining sensible conservation measures with a focus on generating new power.

This legislation focuses on bringing more power to the state by opening the door for private industry to meet the state's energy needs:

- Allowing larger power plants to be built without the slow and complicated permitting process — cuts red tape.
- Helping older power plants meet environmental regulations so they can operate longer periods each day.
- Encouraging aluminum companies to build their own on-site power plants to free-up additional power for everyone else.

This energy package also brings real relief to low-income families and senior citizens who have been hurt the worst by huge rate increases. \$2.5 million was provided for low-income energy assistance in addition to the \$1 million appropriated earlier this year.

Sensible conservation plans are also included in the package. It requires state and public school buildings to implement energy conservation measures. And utilities are required to give consumers the option to purchase power from alternative energy sources.

Because conservation can never fully address the state's growing energy needs, this energy package focuses on bringing more power to the state, while sensibly encouraging responsible conservation.



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We want to hear from you!

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